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## LEISURE &amp; ARTS

## Chairman Malcolm and His Toys

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It's hard to walk through the just-opened Forbes magazine galleries without chuckling over the battalions of toy soldiers, the letters from U.S. presidents interested in other than affairs of state, the elaborate trophies awarded obscure individuals for forgotten feats. It's especially hard for Malcolm Forbes.

Just stepping into the 8,000-square-foot exhibit space—on the ground floor of the Forbes Building at 62 Fifth Avenue—makes him positively gleeful. Voracious collecting, an apparently genetic condition among Forbeses, had so outpaced the collectors' ability to display their holdings that hundreds of tin and cast-iron toy boats were stored in a fallout shelter at the family home in Far Hills, N.J. Now, after two years and \$2.5 million of planning and construction, the corporate collection is on view in all its eccentric glory, from Lincoln manuscripts to jeweled Faberge parasol handles. The chairman can hardly restrain himself.

"The first autograph of consequence I ever bought" is now in the autograph gallery, which Philadelphia architect John Blatteau designed to resemble a men's club with carved cornices and pediments. It's a letter from Lincoln to his secretary of war; Mr. Forbes was a Princeton undergraduate with a \$100-a-month allowance when he bought it for \$1,200 from an accommodating dealer who accepted \$75 a month in payment. "Tad would like some flags to wave," Mr. Forbes quotes. "The human dimension is so exciting. This stuff better portrays the person's character than any artist or photographer. Here, the man sat down and wrote it. It's not Gilbert Stuart, it's Washington setting up the CIA"—a reference to a favorite item, a 1779 letter in which General Washington approves some murky espionage scheme to smuggle messages in books. "It gets him out of the cherry tree category, this characterless epitome of greatness. It gives him warmth."

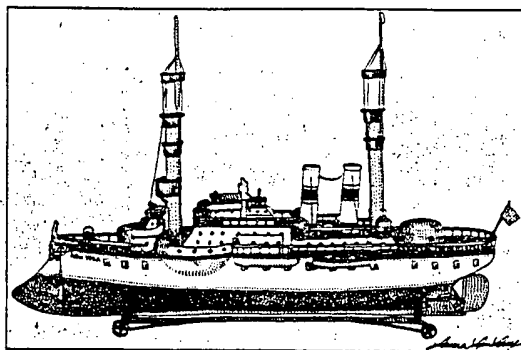
"Here's Lincoln's last letter to his wife from Grant's headquarters. 'Things are going well at the front, and so forth, and p.s., would you pass this along to the secretary of war.'" Mr. Forbes guffaws. "Can you imagine the scandal if Mr. Reagan wrote, 'Nancy, pass this along to the secretary of defense?'"

The cabinet of Truman's letters and memorabilia particularly amuses him. "I wouldn't appoint John L. Lewis dog-catcher. Ha! 'Your lousy review of Margaret's concert.' . . . He was furious. History alive!"

That collection is what he would rescue if the building burned, Mr. Forbes tells people who insist on asking. The Faberge

gallery, a pink candy box enshrining 200 of the Czars' goldsmiths' masterworks, narrowly tops it for dollar value: each of the 10 imperial Easter eggs is worth more than a million dollars. Last week, walking through the galleries taking notes of air ducts and light bulbs and other finishing details, one of the designers wondered whether brochure holders should be installed at the entrances to the Faberge exhibit. "The brochure holders," replied Forbes associate publisher Christopher "Kip" Forbes, "will have two feet and wear dark-blue uniforms."

The toy and trophy displays fashioned by Peter Purpura and Gary Kisner outstrip everything else for sheer fun, though. A flotilla of toy ocean liners, tin flags rip-



pling in an imaginary breeze, float at anchor on a glossy Plexiglas sea; river boats cruise past a promenade where miniature belles carry tiny parasols; a \$28,600 toy Lusitania, the most expensive boat in the collection, lies on the sandy ocean floor at the bottom of a display of toy submarines. Purpura & Kisner thoughtfully provide fake rivets on the walls, sonar beeps for the subs, a banjo-and-fiddle sound track for the paddle-wheelers, and an antique copper tub holding an array of bath toys including a box of Lusitania soap ("Guaranteed to sink").

Next door, 12,000 tin and lead troops (100,000 more are encamped in another Forbes museum in Tangiers) face off. Alexander the Great defeats the Persians; the Italians invade Ethiopia; Kaiser Wilhelm reviews the troops; pewter Spaniards and Aztecs battle on a Pyramid of the Sun, glued together from hundreds of slivers of heavy cardboard at Purpura & Kisner's New York studio.

"It's the ultimate exercise in nostalgia," says Malcolm Forbes. None of his own boyhood soldiers or boats lasted long enough to join the collection. "The ones that survive, it's largely because kids weren't allowed to play with them. All my soldiers got broken or left or passed on to younger brothers."

Inside the exhibit, the chairman bounces delightedly from one display to another. "The Indians circling the wagon train. I'd never have thought of that. They've recreated what we imagined with our six or eight soldiers. And every kid had

a castle of some kind, a box or something. Look, have you ever seen such a nifty castle?" It is nearly five feet high, a many-turreted affair that took the designers' staff six weeks to construct from strips of illustration board.

The same firm created the brick "sidewalk" flanked by "pawn shop" and "flea market" windows to house the trophy collection. It includes, among the engraved plaques and cups, a silver tray awarded in 1898 for the best five acres of "swedes" (rutabagas) grown with Bradburn's manure. "It all had such consequence to the person presented it at the time. Forever stuff," Mr. Forbes grins. "It puts all museuming, all collecting, all ego-tripping in perspective. It reminds you that we're all pretty ephemeral."

Mr. Forbes may prove less ephemeral than most. His quotes and letters and some family portraits are sprinkled through the galleries, and the only trophies in the collection whose recipients aren't dead are the World War II dog tags, medals and citation awarded Staff Sgt. Malcolm Forbes.

Yet the galleries won't ensure immortality; in fact, a few years of red ink could dissolve them. "If we go broke, everything goes back on the block," Mr. Forbes says cheerfully. "We don't have museum pretensions."

The galleries—which include a roomful of French military paintings and two quite glorious art deco restrooms—are open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nine hundred free tickets are issued daily, first-come, first-served, except on Thursdays, which is reserved for groups and those with advance reservations.

Ms. Span writes about business and the arts.